

APARTMENT PLAN RUFFLES POTOMAC

Mrs. Kennedy's Stepfather
Sells Land for Project

Special to The New York Times.

WASHINGTON, April 29—Mrs. John F. Kennedy's stepfather, Hugh D. Auchincloss, has become involved here in a bitter zoning dispute that has significant conservation overtones.

He has contracted to sell forty-six acres on the Virginia side of the Potomac River, just northwest of Washington, for a huge tower apartment development. This would bring the first high-rise apartments to the Potomac Palisades.

The apartment plan provoked an uproar when it was unexpectedly approved by the Board of Supervisors of Fairfax County, Va. They granted an exception from the neighborhood's zoning, which calls for single-family homes on one-acre lots.

Mr. Auchincloss' land and home, known as Merrywood, are in McLean, Va., a well-to-do suburb with no apartments until now. Jacqueline Kennedy lived there as a girl.

Apartments Opposed

Local opposition to apartments is intense. The county supervisor for the McLean area, Claiborne Leigh, a Republican, was elected in 1959 on a platform of standing "firmly against the construction of apartment anywhere in the district." Nevertheless, Mr. Leigh made the motion for approval of the project.

The action has brought charges of "corruption." There have been questions about the disclosure that the county sheriff, John E. Taylor, was the real estate agent in the sale of the land for an amount estimated at upwards of \$600,000.

A grand jury inquiry into the transaction was ordered last week in Fairfax County. It is to begin on May 18.

Of more interest generally to the Washington area is the corruption question in effect the project will have on the Potomac Gorge, which has been one of the area's scenic attractions.

The Secretary of the Interior, Stewart L. Udall, has denounced the proposal on conservation and esthetic grounds.

"Since the time of our first President," Mr. Udall said, "we as a nation have recognized the Potomac Palisades as a great resource, and over the considerable effort has been made to preserve its

4 Governments Involved

Four governments have been involved in preserving the Potomac scenery—the District of Columbia and Montgomery County, Md., on one side, Arlington and Fairfax County, Va., on the other. To date all have banned high-rise apartments on the river beyond downtown Washington.

The apartments to be built on the Auchincloss property are three towers of seventeen stories each. They would dominate the Potomac Valley north and west of the city, and would be higher than the Capitol building.

Opponents of the project also argue that if these apartments are built, it will inevitably lead to a general breakdown of the rule against high-rise apartments in the upper Potomac.

They say the woods and cliffs of the gorge will be dominated by rows of apartment towers.

Mr. Auchincloss has said that he has a right to dispose of his property for the highest available price. He said the proposed apartments "didn't appeal much to my esthetic sense," but he said that was the developers' business.